IDENTITY OF WITCHWEED IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

In 1956 witchweed was found to be parasitizing field plantings of corn (*Zea mays* L.) in North Carolina and South Carolina. Because potential loss from this infestation is severe, immediate steps were effectively taken to prevent the spread of the parasite. The original specimens were tentatively identified as *Striga asiatica* (L.) O. Kuntze. The botanical nomenclature of this genus has been subject to interpretation by the various botanists who have dealt with it and only recently has an effective review been written (Saldanha, C. J. 1963).

In late 1964, Dr. V. P. Rao, a visitor from India, questioned the identification of the witchweed in the United States. He kindly furnished a copy of the Saldanha paper and a suite of specimens identified by Saldanha with which the local *Striga* could be compared. No doubt remains that this plant is *Striga lutea* Lour., which includes one of the elements of *S. asiatica*, a name now abandoned as a source of confusion.

However, Rao writes (in a personal communication) ". . . . the species found in the United States has red flowers which I have never seen in the common witchweeds which we come across in this country [India]." While it is true that the bulk of the population in the United States has very bright chinese-red flowers, individuals with lemon yellow flowers occasionally appear. Rarely an individual plant is found in which the flowers are yellow with red marks or stripes. Perhaps the flower color is due to the original introduction of red-flowered plants from Kottayam, India, where a population is known, or from South Africa, where the bulk of the plants of this species are said to be red-flowered.

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